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GOP may battle itself over cutting deficit

WASHINGTON, Jan. 3 (UPI) -- The Republican Party could be at war with itself over how and when to begin work on reducing the U.S. deficit, political observers say.

The party must decide whether to try to forge a bipartisan deficit-cutting deal with President Obama or dig in on deep spending cuts, then wait -- and hope -- for a Republican in the White House in 2012 to enact changes, The Hill reported.

"Momentum for deficit-cutting hasn't been this great in many years," said Bob Bixby, executive director of the Concord Coalition, which advocates tackling the national debt.

While efforts by Sens. Saxby Chambliss, R-Ga., and Mark Warner, D-Va., to develop a bipartisan Senate bill based on the president's debt commission recommendations offer hope of a budget deal now, Bixby said the House of Representatives "could be a stumbling block in the negotiations," The Hill said Sunday.

Noting House Republicans refused to back the debt commission report, Bixby said, "They just won the majority and feel they need to make a statement."

GOP leaders will have to appease Tea Party movement-backed freshmen while trying to get spending cuts that can earn Obama's signature, The Hill said.

"It will be an interesting battle within the Republican party. Republican leadership will be in a bind," Tad DeHaven of the Cato Institute said. "A lot of the fresh blood would have pushed against going along with that tax deal" because it included spending increases on unemployment insurance.

New House members also want real debate on big issues, such as whether to eliminate the departments of Education and Transportation, DeHaven said.

"I still sense that the old guard does not want to have that conversation," he said.